

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource -- Employees

State Employee Assistance Program 1-800-308-4934 (Toll Free)

■ **My employee's wife called me and asked that I arrange an EAP referral for her husband, due to his anger problem. She asked me not to tell her husband we spoke. However, I have seen little evidence of his anger at work. Should I ignore her request, or should I use the information in some way?**

Occasionally, family members who are desperate to see loved ones receive counseling, addiction treatment, or other kinds of help for personal problems, ask managers or bosses to intervene. Crossing this work-life boundary is something you should avoid. Your best response would be to refer family members or concerned persons to the EAP. Meanwhile, the information provided by your employee's wife about his anger problem is not appropriate in your supervisory relationship. You should not accept on face value the complaints of family members when they make unsolicited calls to the workplace. If your employee's performance and personality do not pose a problem in the workplace—and if he rarely expresses anger—you are not in a position to act. Information offered by a family member, even if consistent with workplace behaviors, cannot be used to manage the employee.

■ **One of my best employees hired a private "life coach" a few months ago. Since then, he has behaved like an overaggressive bully. He's willing to participate in the EAP, but only if his coach can attend. Is this a good idea? Shouldn't I object?**

When making a supervisor referral to the EAP, there is no need for you to enter into a struggle over whether your employee's private "life coach" can accompany him. This is a matter the EAP will address. The EAP may actually agree to the request, but likely will also ask to see your employee one-on-one. The point of the supervisor referral is improving your employee's performance. Therefore, any reasonable approach to accomplishing this goal should be considered. Because it is critical that a successful EAP session occur without a third-party influence, the EA professional will establish boundaries to maintain the integrity of the session. If the employee refuses to be seen alone, this choice should not interfere with your ability to manage his performance. You would simply respond in an appropriate manner to ongoing job performance issues, if any.

■ **My employee suffered a string of personal tragedies recently. Although she assures me she's under a psychologist's care, she's as distraught as ever and her**

The need to document your employee's declining performance justifies making a supervisor referral to the EAP, no matter what kind of outside help she reports getting. An employee's reported participation in counseling should never be a determining factor in a supervisor's decision to make an EAP referral. You do not know if the right help is being received or if the help is being dispensed in a proper manner. Because the EAP is designed to provide short-term help and refer individuals to

performance is declining. If she's already undergoing counseling, would it be overkill for me to involve the EAP?

other resources for long-term support, the timing might actually be opportune for her to participate. The EA professional may refer her to additional services to assist her in grappling with her problems, or may help her make better use of the help she is currently receiving. Sometimes EA professionals must convince employees that the help they currently receive is not suitable to resolving their problems or could make problems worse.

I'm convinced that my employee is a hypochondriac. He misses a few hours each week for doctors' appointments, even though he appears to be in good health. He says his allergies, backaches, or other ailments require medical care, but I'm skeptical. Can the EAP help?

You have taken a misstep by trying to "diagnose" your employee. This may have delayed making a supervisor referral because you question whether a referral is appropriate for the personal problem you have identified. The jumble of symptoms your employee complains about could be related to many different types of disorders, or it could be that your employee reports a host of medical problems to elicit sympathy and avoid being confronted about performance and attendance issues. Make an EAP referral based upon your employee's performance and attendance issues, without concluding that you know the nature of his personal problems. If a medical assessment of your employee is necessary to arrive at a proper diagnosis, the EAP will make sure this happens. What's relevant is that your employee regularly misses work due to doctors' appointments, and his frequent absences affect his job.

My staff likes to suggest new performance incentives or employee benefits. We have no budget for extras so I often shoot down their ideas. I hate to say "no" all the time, so what can I do to preserve morale in the face of absence of funds to offer tangible incentives?

Consider being open about your organization's financial situation. Once employees understand cash flow constraints, their suggestions will more likely be cost-saving proposals on how to boost morale in ways that are meaningful to them. As employees realize the cost of adding various benefits, they will realize that you're not rejecting their ideas as much as you are looking for ways to say "yes" without busting the budget. At the same time, apply morale-boosting ideas that don't cost anything by doing your own research. You can find a host of fun-to-read books on boosting morale with no budget by performing a quick search on the site of any online book dealer.

NOTES:

The Employee Assistance Program announces the availability of confidential and anonymous screening for depression and alcohol. You may call toll-free at 1-866-249-1580 to participate in an interactive recording using your telephone keypad. Results are given immediately and persons scoring positive may be connected directly to the EAP for further assistance. This service is provided through Magellan Health Services, our EAP contracted vendor.

